

A close-up photograph of several pink flowers, likely azaleas, with delicate petals and visible stamens. The flowers are in sharp focus, filling the left and top portions of the page.

Perfection

A PASSING PHRASE IN A BOOK I AM CURRENTLY reading caught my attention and prompted deeper ruminations.

In both human and historical terms [Julius] Caesar stands at the point where the great contrasts of existence meet and combine. Caesar was a man of immense creativity, yet gifted with a penetrating intellect... supreme in will and achievement, imbued with republican ideals, yet born to be a king, a Roman to the core, yet with a vocation to reconcile and unite Roman and Greek traditions within himself and communicate them to a wider world. In all this Caesar is the whole and complete man.

Theodor Mommsen (quoted in Caesar: A Biography, by Christian Meier)

"...the whole and complete man."

It reminded me of something the *Newsweek* writer, Evan Thomas, said in an interview, in June of 2009, about the current resident of the White House:

And he—he has a very different job from—Reagan was all about America, and you talked about it. Obama is “we are above that now.” We’re not just parochial, we’re not just chauvinistic, we’re not just provincial. We stand for something—I mean in a way Obama’s standing above the country, above—above the world, he’s sort of God... He’s going to bring all different sides together... He’s the teacher. He is going to say, “now, children, stop fighting and quarreling with each other.” And he has a kind of a moral authority that he—he can—he can do that.

“He’s sort of God.”



“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:48

What is it that makes a man or woman what Scripture calls “perfect”—that is, complete or

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whole? Is it, as with Julius Caesar, creativity, intellect, great achievement on the battle field? Is it being someone, like the journalist's idealized impression of President Obama, who is not provincial but universal in scope? Is it, as with the descriptions of both men, being someone who can reconcile and unite, bring all sides together under a supposed moral authority?

Just what is it that completes a man?

Jesus, in His sermon on the mount, was updating what Jehovah said to Moses, and recorded in the Torah:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'"

Leviticus 19:1-2

The Lord God then continued itemizing the specifics of His commandments for human behavior under His law. Under that covenant, to be a complete man, one had to meet all the requirements of the Mosaic Law, as specified in the Torah. In other words—impossible.

But under the *new* covenant, the definition of "complete" or "perfect" was changed. In Christ, believers are made perfect by His blood. And the writer to the Hebrews explains the difference between the two covenants, beginning with the old:

For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

Hebrews 10:1

Then the writer shows how things have changed under the new covenant:

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Hebrews 10:10-14



I can't speak for Julius Caesar or President Obama, but *I* am perfect. I am whole and complete. No matter what my wife and friends may tell you, I am absolutely perfect.

This wasn't accomplished because of my superlative creativity or intellect, nor by my victorious campaigns on the battlefield. Frankly, I *am* rather provincial: I think America has it all over Europe, thank you very much. Neither would I say I am any great shakes when it comes to unifying disparate parties, and I make no claim to any vaulted moral authority.

So how is it I can so confidently claim the mantle of perfection?

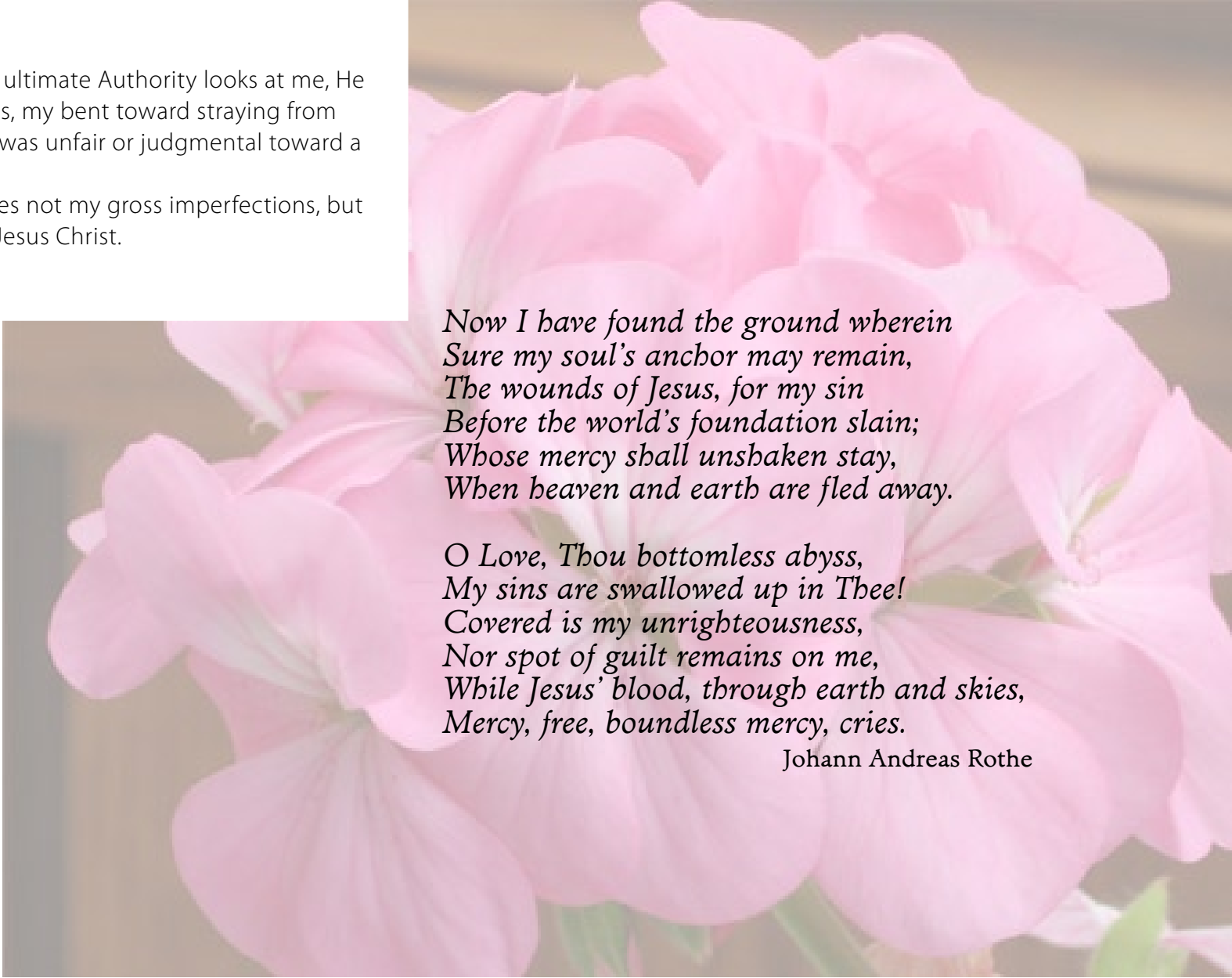
Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

Because I am in Christ, when the ultimate Authority looks at me, He sees not my failings, my weaknesses, my bent toward straying from His path. He sees not those times I was unfair or judgmental toward a brother.

No, when God looks at me He sees not my gross imperfections, but the singular perfection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Because I am in Him.



*Now I have found the ground wherein
Sure my soul's anchor may remain,
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin
Before the world's foundation slain;
Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,
When heaven and earth are fled away.*

*O Love, Thou bottomless abyss,
My sins are swallowed up in Thee!
Covered is my unrighteousness,
Nor spot of guilt remains on me,
While Jesus' blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries.*

Johann Andreas Rothe